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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001594

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TIGER CHILD RECRUITMENT OUTSTRIPS
RELEASES

Classified By: CDA JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1. 4 (B,D).

[11.](#) (U) Summary: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continue to recruit children under the age of 18 at a rate outpacing the number of child soldiers it has released under a UNICEF-sponsored Action Plan signed last year. UNICEF has been forthright in publicizing and criticizing the Tigers' demonstrated failure to implement the only human rights agreement it has signed since the ceasefire began in 2002. End summary.

[12.](#) (U) UNICEF statistics on the Action Plan for Children Affected by War, which was signed by both the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) just before negotiations broke down in April 2003, show that the agency has received reports that the Tigers have recruited 4,482 children under the age of 18 since April [2001](#). Some recruits have been as young as 11. (Note: Since the statistics track only reports received by UNICEF, usually from parents of recruits, the actual rate of child recruitment is likely far higher. End note.) The Tigers have formally released only 1,003 children over the same time frame. (Note: These statistics do not include at least 1,800 child soldiers in the East who "walked home" after the defection of the LTTE's Eastern military commander Karuna in March because those children did not receive a formal letter of release from the LTTE. End note.) During the first six months of 2004, UNICEF statistics show that the number of children recruited by the LTTE (488) more than filled any void left by the number of children formally released by the Tigers (449) over the same six-month span. Releases are more or less distributed evenly by gender. Of the 488 children recruited during this period, there were 86 reports of "re-recruitment" of children previously released, especially in the East. According to UNICEF, many of these incidents of "re-recruitment" occurred at or near schoolgrounds and were often accompanied by violence, i.e., LTTE cadres beating parents or children who attempted to resist.

[13.](#) (U) UNICEF officers are frank about the LTTE's failure to honor its commitments under the Action Plan, the only human rights agreement the LTTE has signed since the beginning of the ceasefire in 2002. In July UNICEF Resident Representative Ted Chaiban sent a letter to the diplomatic community noting a disturbing spike in recruitment over May and June (likely to fill the void created by Karuna's cadres) and asking for international pressure on the LTTE to honor its commitments. On September 9 Chaiban issued a press release noting that progress under the Action Plan is "at risk when the LTTE does not take its commitment to end recruitment seriously."

[14.](#) (C) Bo Victor Nylund, the head of UNICEF's Child Protection Section, believes that while the Action Plan may have helped increase the number of releases, it has not had the desired effect in ending recruitment. According to Nylund, the LTTE signed the Action Plan to enhance its credibility as a legitimate political actor and not because it had any intention of fulfilling its obligations. That said, Nylund believes that pressure from the international community may be the best way to get the LTTE to honor its commitments. The Tiger leadership denies that it actively recruits children--despite vivid eyewitness accounts from parents to the contrary--claiming instead that the children volunteer for service out of a genuine desire to contribute to the goal of an ethnic homeland and thus--at least according to the LTTE--cannot be turned away. The LTTE has "no political commitment" to end underage recruitment, Nylund charged, because the Tigers rely on indoctrination, especially of the young, to cultivate the unquestioning loyalty needed to wage successful guerrilla warfare. For that reason, he added, many of the children officially returned by the LTTE seem to miss the sense of belonging and self-importance the organization apparently gave them and say they want to return. Most of the children formally released, Nylund observed, seem to be those not wanted by the LTTE, e.g., those who showed little promise as recruits because of physical or mental limitations.

[15.](#) (C) Comment: The Tigers may want to enhance their standing as a legitimate political alternative to the Government, but not badly enough, apparently, to respect the UN-sponsored Action Plan that could give their claims to

represent Tamil interests some credibility. The Tigers' continued refusal to honor the one human rights commitment they have made under the ceasefire so far is not a promising indicator of how they will address other commitments they may make if negotiations resume. We will continue to encourage our colleagues in the diplomatic community to call the Tigers publicly on their cynical and self-interested willingness to put the most vulnerable members of the Tamil population in harm's way.

LUNSTEAD